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ABSTRACT

The author discusses the thesis that self-concept tests are not construct valid for blacks because they may be measuring group (rather than individual) self-concept. In several listed studies, black children failed to identify with their own group in doll selection tasks. Williams suggested that children's social learning emphasizes the concept that black is bad and white is good. Clark, in 1939, suggested that black self image is a reflection of society's image of blacks. Hraba and Grant found more positive self concepts in black children in 1970, perhaps due to the local "Black Movement" and increased pride. Fox and Jordan also found that social change enhanced black self esteem in a study of black, white, and Chinese children. A study comparing black and white college students in 1963 and in 1969 indicated that blacks felt increasingly positive toward blacks and less positive toward whites, while white attitudes remained constant. The author feels that it is plausible to assume that black self concept is a function of group rather than individual dynamics, since cross-sectional studies indicate shifts in self concept were uniform for the majority of black respondents. (GDC)

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On the Appropriateness of Testing Black Self-Concept

Robert H. Brick

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Introduction

In the twin fields of educational and psychological measurement, considerable controversy - - - if not clamor - - - has arisen from attempts to establish methods for determining the extent to which an affective-type test is construct valid. Such controversy has drawn interest from well-known psychometric theorists like Bechtoldt (1967), Campbell (1967), Campbell and Fiske (1967), Cronbach and Meehl (1967), and Loevinger (1967).

While these theorists advocate rather elaborate methods for determining how accurately an instrument measures a particular construct in the affective domain, they fail to take into account the fact that the nature of a particular testing population under study may have considerable bearing on whether or not an affective-type test measures what it purports to measure.

In recent years, considerable attention has focused on minority testing in cognitive or scholastic areas, but not in non-cognitive areas. This is not difficult to understand, since career - and college - admission policies for minority groups are not typically based upon (their) performances on affective tests. However, this is not to suggest that minority testing in affective areas is not important; there are implications for education and for related fields.

The thesis presented in this paper is rather straightforward: self-concept tests are not believed to be construct valid for blacks because they may be measuring group instead of individual self-concept.

Self-Concept Tests and the Black Examinee

In measuring the black child's self-concept, a common strategy has been to measure his ability to identify himself by either making selections from pictures or dolls of children representing ethnicities other than his own (Clark & Clark, 1939; 1940) or in evaluating colors on a connotative

dimension (Edwards & Williams, 1970: McAdoo, 1970; McMurty & Williams, 1972; Renninger & Williams, 1966; Williams & Roberson, 1967; Williams & Rousseau, 1971; Williams, Williams, & Beck, 1973).

In practically all of these studies, the black children failed to identify (with) their own group in doll selection tasks and demonstrated the tendency to denigrate the color black and to favor the color white.

Fortunately, Williams (1964) has offered a tenable explanation for why blacks show a lower self-concept rating than whites, and links connotative factors with sociological ones in an attempt to explain this phenomenon. Since the color "black" is often referred to in negative connotative usages (e.g., Black Day, Black Year, Blackmail, Black Future, Blackball, etc.) they serve as negative references to the concept of blackness. This, coupled with the black's past social history, conspires to make the "white-is-good" and "black-is-bad" concept more of a reality than it actually is, and suggests that skin color possesses both racial and social significance (Clark & Clark, 1939, 1940; Horowitz, 1947; Trager, 1954).

If Williams' (1964) assertion is accurate, we might add that the validity of the black's self-concept is as fluid a measure as the sociological, political, and educational variables which underpin it. Taking this idea to another level of abstraction, it is argued that because of the black's emergence into our political, social, educational, and economic mainstream, it would seem likely that such advancement among blacks would result in higher black group self-concept ratings.

Clark (1939) depicted the phenomena of "self-hatred" and "self-rejection" among black children as a reflection of society's relegation of blacks to an inferior and low position in American society. Clark adds that if the black individual is to view himself more positively, it will be largely a reflection

of how society views him.

Hraba and Grant (1970) wished to see if there would be changes in responses to being black in contrast to the findings from earlier Clark studies, in which whiteness and blackness evoked positive and negative responses from children, respectively. In this replication of the Clark paradigm, four-to eight-year old black and white children attending interracial schools in Lincoln, Nebraska, obtained significant differences between their findings and Clark's. In most cases, this group of black children were more prone to identify with themselves and prefer black playmates than those black children studied earlier. The authors have suggested that the increases in own-race preferences (among the black children) could reasonably be accounted for by the influence of the "Black Movement" in Lincoln, Nebraska, which was thought to have engendered black pride.

Fox and Jordan (1973) also have found that social change is responsible for enhanced black self esteem. In a study involving black, white, and Chinese children ranging in age from five to seven years, it was found that a significantly higher proportion of blacks identified with their own group (in general) than did the Chinese children. This is a form of the "self-rejection" syndrome described earlier by Clark. Undoubtedly it reflects society's failure to acknowledge the Chinese as respectable minority group. If society did, however, one would expect that these Chinese children would have shown greater self-identity in the testing sessions.

A fairly recent effort has been made to assess the possible effect of the black identity movement on color meanings (Williams, Tucker, & Dunham, 1971). These researchers compared ratings of white and black obtained in a 1969 study to those obtained in a 1963 study. White and black college students were subjects in both studies. While the white students' ratings remained consistent

in their positive identification with white, the black students' rating of black was found to have moved in a very positive direction, while their rating of white had moved in a very negative direction.

Ward and Braun (1972), using a self-concept measure with seven-and eight-year old blacks, found that those children with higher self-concept scores indicated more black color preferences than those with lower self-concept scores. Thus, a black's positive or negative self-concept is largely a group instead of an individual measure, influenced by social and political change.

Summary

By reference to the literature reviewed herein, it appears plausible to assume that a black's self-concept is a function of group rather than individual dynamics, since results of cross-sectional studies have shown that shifts in projective self-concept ratings were uniform for the majority of the black respondents studied.

Self-concept tests are most commonly used in areas of counseling, but are used in educational evaluation to provide auxiliary measures of scholastic achievement. In view of this, it is appropriate to question the feasibility of obtaining self-concept measures from a black population, and essential to determine the social, political, and regional factors that induce high or low group self-concept ratings among this population, in order that appropriate remediation can be taken.

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